



VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH

Meeting Minutes

Education in Local Detention Centers Advisory Group Meeting

Virtual Meeting

October 6, 2020
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Meeting Attendees:

Amy Atkinson, Melinda Boone, Tanner Boyle, Marilyn Brown, Laurie Cooper, John Day, Will Egen, Barry Green, Jeffrey Levine, W. Rice Lilley, Sen. Dave Marsden, Alicia Myrick, Mary Ann Plogger, Zachary Robbins, Angela Valentine, Tyler Williams, Amy Woolard, Joe Young

I. Welcome and Introductions

The Honorable Dave Marsden, Chairman, Virginia Commission on Youth

Senator Marsden welcomed the Advisory Group and asked Advisory Group members and staff to introduce themselves.

Ms. Atkinson reviewed the agenda and documents provided to members.

II. Education Requirements and Evaluations

Length of Stay

Advisory Group Discussion

Ms. Atkinson reviewed length of stay data, noting that about 50 percent of students are in detention for 10 days or fewer, and 75 percent are in detention for 25 days or fewer. Youth are tested in math and reading within 72 hours of arrival and tested again if and when their length of stay reaches 90 days, as mandated by federal law.

The group discussed the following topics:

Benchmark Testing

Ms. Atkinson asked whether educational progress should be evaluated prior to the 90 day requirement to assess progress. Some members expressed interest in testing prior to 90 days to better evaluate educational programs for shorter-term stays. Other members noted that testing would not be useful for stays shorter than 60 days.

What Are the Needs of Youth in Detention?

Members felt that it was difficult to discuss education in detention without fully understanding the specific needs of youth in detention. Ms. Woolard expressed interest in receiving data about how many kids had special education needs (IEPs), as well as data that explained why they were placed in detention. Ms. Valentine noted that data about why youth are placed in detention is not available without an outside data request. The group discussed what risk/public safety assessment were being performed by Court Services Units and noted that it was likely that, since fewer youth were now placed in detention, those that were placed in detention may have more serious issues, which may impact their educational needs.

Should the Educational Programs Be Structured Differently Based on Length-of-Stay?

The group discussed whether it would be beneficial to provide different services to youth who are in detention for a very short time. Ms. Boone noted that the data shows that teaching positions align with meeting graduation requirements, which may not be appropriate for short term students. Mr. Green made several suggestions, including allowing detention centers to set different types of benchmarks for different length of stays, using an online format with fewer specialized teachers, or using tutors/mentors for short term students. Mr. Boyle noted that short term students benefited from the current system because detention centers could provide home schools with new schedules and modifications to IEPs. Mr. Young noted that there is great benefit to giving youth a real education that isn't watered down, as it shows the detained youth that they can succeed.

III. Student-Teacher Ratio

Advisory Group Discussion

Ms. Atkinson reviewed data that showed that current student-teacher ratios vary from 5.1:1 to 1.3:1, based on the number of teaching positions compared to average daily populations. She noted that, as a comparison, private day schools typically have a student-teacher ratio of 8-10 students per 1 teacher, and only three private day schools had a ratio lower than detention centers. Mr. Green and Ms. Woolard noted that this was not a helpful comparison because day schools have a more stable population and a predictable length-of-stay.

Mr. Levine noted that the student-teacher ratio is set at 12:1 in the law; however, the law does not address underpopulation. Ms. Atkinson suggested writing a recommendation to address this.

Senator Marsden noted that the student-teacher ratio at Bon Air was currently about 4:1. He pointed out that, even at a 200 bed facility, it is difficult to have a higher student-teacher ratio because the needs of the students are so varied.

Members also discussed the following topics:

How Detention is Managed by Other States

Senator Marsden noted that, from his experience, Virginia had one of the best systems in the country because it has a partnership between state and local government. Ms. Atkinson noted that staff did not find any other states that could be compared, structurally, with Virginia.

Coordination Between Detention Centers and Home Schools

Ms. Cooper stated that there is no requirement for the home school to cooperate with detention centers to keep students current in their classwork, and that cooperation varies depending upon the school division and how familiar they are with the student. The group favored recommending more coordination between detention centers and home schools.

Enrichment Programs

Members discussed the possibility of preserving core courses and reducing the focus on enrichment as a cost-saving measure. Ms. Boone noted that youth with academic challenges really benefited from enrichment, as it can be the thing that turns a child around academically. The group concluded that DOE is ultimately responsible for determining academic and enrichment programs within detention.

IV. Funding of Education in Detention

Advisory Group Discussion

Ms. Cooper described how education in detention is funded. She noted that SOP recently cut 17.5 percent of teaching positions, in part because salaries were high in Northern Virginia. SOP attempted to preserve positions at centers with CPP programs and to cut positions in centers with low ADPs.

Ms. Atkinson asked if more teachers could be part-time. Ms. Cooper said that this was possible, but it would affect the quality of instruction. The group discussed whether it would be possible to encourage more teacher-sharing between detention centers and schools.

Ms. Atkinson said that cost per seat was about \$41,000 on average. Senator Marsden noted that this cost is just for salaries and supplies, as the locality absorbs costs such as heating, janitors, and so forth.

Recommendations and Closing Comments

Ms. Atkinson described the recommendations that would be drafted and asked for suggestions for other recommendations.

Ms. Cooper and Ms. Woolard expressed their concern about reducing resources for the detention population, of which 68 percent are persons of color. They noted that DOE is currently working to target and support these students.

Ms. Woolard was interested in seeing more collaboration between detention centers and school divisions. Ms. Cooper noted that there is a regulation requiring assistance from a reenrollment coordinator at the local schools which has not been followed consistently. Ms. Atkinson stated that staff would write a recommendation addressing this.

Senator Marsden asked if dual certified teachers were being utilized. Ms. Atkinson said the group could recommend studying that issue.

Mr. Green recommended creating different educational strategies for pre-D and post-D youth to increase efficiency.

Ms. Valentine suggested that SOP shift to a year-round school model and stated this would be of great benefit to students.

Ms. Brown and Ms. Woolard emphasized that, as the Commission on Youth, it was very important that the recommendations emphasize that the current system is good, and that kids in detention face grave challenges, including trauma and mental health issues. Senator Marsden said that perhaps funds should be shifted to mental health supports, depending upon needs. The group agreed that needs of the current population should be evaluated before modifying programs.

Senator Marsden confirmed that student-teacher ratios and Title I standards needed to be updated and incorporated into *Code*.

V. Next Steps and Adjournment

Senator Marsden stated that recommendations would go out to the group a few days prior to the full Commission meeting, and group members should comment on those recommendations.

The meeting adjourned at about 12:17 pm.

The video of this meeting can be found at the following link: [Meeting Video Archive](#).